DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 252 725 CE 040 558

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TITLE Improved Teacher Preparation through Increased Field Experience.
PUB DATE 3 Dec 84
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the American Vocational Association Convention (New Orleans, LA, December 3, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Benefits; Educational Practices; *Field Experience Programs; Higher Education; Industrial Arts; Instructional Improvement; Literature Reviews; *Outcomes of Education; *Preservice Teacher Education; *School Visitation; Secondary Education; Teaching Methods; *Vocational Education Teachers
IDENTIFIERS *University of Hawaii

ABSTRACT

The value of early field experience in preservice teacher education programs has been debated in the literature on teacher education. While some see little or no value in the practice, others view early field experience programs as a means of improving the self-concept of prospective teachers and as a way of enhancing their acquisition of the skills that will subsequently be addressed in methods courses. The University of Hawaii Early Field Experience Program, which is based on linking methods courses with field experience in the secondary schools, is conducted in two areas of the preservice program: the first experience occurs during the generic methods course early in the student's professional education core, and the second takes place during the content methods course later in the student's professional education core. The first phase of the program, which lasts for 12 weeks, involves at least one class period per week, and optimally may involve one half-day observation session per week. The experiences include three stages: orientation, involvement, and evaluation. The field experience program that takes place during the industrial arts content methods course typically involves 20 hours of observation and participation at one school over a period of 10 weeks but can also involve such options as 5 initial visits, each to separate schools, followed by 5 visits to one of the schools observed during the first set of 5 visits. (MN)

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IMPROVED TEACHER PREPARATION THROUGH INCREASED FIELD EXPERIENCE

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December 3, 1984

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IMPROVED TEACHER PREPARATION THROUGH INCREASED FIELD EXPERIENCE

by

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Field experience is one of the most common elements in teacher preparation programs. Teacher educators generally agree it is a necessary and essential part of teacher preparation. However, a review of literature reveals conflicting evidence regarding the usefulness of pre-student teaching experiences. There are many who indicate that early field experience programs do little to help a student become a better teacher (Hedberg, 1979; Ingle and Zaret, 1968; Ingle and Robinson, 1965). Davis (1983) even says that the value of such an experience has no theroretical base.

On the other side of the coin, there are those who find early field experience to be very worthwhile. Saslaw, Newman, and Crabtree (1983) studied prospective teachers K through 12 in an early field experience program which consisted of 12 hours of classroom observation. The participating students were assigned tasks ranging from active observation to the presentation of lessons. These tasks were then rated on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 with 1 indicating the task had no value to 5 which meant the task had very much value. A summary of the results showed the students scored all tasks from having moderate value to having very much value.

Scherer (1979) found that students who completed an early field experience had a more positive self concept than those students who had not. Denton (1982) found that early field experience provided prospective teachers with

an experimental basis for analyzing knowledge and skills of teaching. He also found that students who had completed an early field experience program had greater comprehension of the concepts of teaching than those who did not have the program. It was concluded that early field experience provided a classroom reference for analyzing instructional skills which were subsquently addressed in a methods class. A study by Ross, Hughes and Hill (1983) suggested that the acquisiton of learning concepts, instructional, concepts and skills can be enchanced by involvement in an early field experience program.

Possibly it is McIntyre's (1983) comprehensive analysis of literature on field experience for preservice education which lends the most overwhelming support for early field experience. His analysis indicates that early field experience 1) allows students to discover early if they like children and want to teach; 2) permits universities to determine students potential; 3) enables students to practice instructional skills prior to student teaching; 4) develops the student's base of perceptions of classroom life; 5) improves communication between the university and the public schools; and 6) accelerates passage through the stages from student to teacher. His analysis also revealed that preservice students in early field experience programs showed an improved attitude toward teaching. McIntyre's analysis concluded that the greatest promise for teacher education lies in the development of preservice programs linking methods courses with field work. This would help integrate theory and practice as well as increase opportunities for preservice teachers to reflect on teaching.

The University of Hawaii Early Field Experience Program is based on linking methods courses with field experience in the secondary schools. This early field experience called observation-participation is conducted in two areas of the preservice program. The first experience is during the generic

methods course early in the student's professional education core. The second is during the content methods course later in the student's professional education core. The primary purpose of the observation-participation (OP) program is to increase the amount of involvement of College of Education students in a teaching-learning situation. It is designed not only to enable the students to observe an experienced teacher working with learners in the classroom but also to enable them to become engaged in teaching by assisting with instructional activities. The students focus on the participation section of the program under the deliberate and careful guidance of a master teacher in the student's major area.

The OP program begins the third week of the semester and continues for approximately twelve weeks. The students observe at least one class period per week. However, students are encouraged to arrange for half-day observation and participation involvement.

The experience includes three phases. In the orientation phase, the student becomes acclimated to the school and classroom. The host teacher confers with the student in the following areas.

1. Ability levels, special problems, and other pertinent characteristics of the students in the class to which the student observer has been assigned.
2. The specific subject matter being studied in the class and the objectives being pursued as well as the methods, resources, texts, and other materials being used.
3. Specific information concerning the host teacher's expectations of the student observer.
4. Pertinent school policies and procedures.

Next is the involvement phase. At this time the student observer is introduced to the class and the program officially begins. During the

first few visitations, the student observer will be involved almost entirely with observing the activities of the teacher and the students. However, it is recommended that the student observer become involved immediately by assisting the host teacher with minor activities such as distributing materials in class, running errands, or creating a bulletin board. Once the student observer is comfortable in the classroom setting, participation in instructional activities can begin. The ultimate outcome of this portion of the program is for the student observer to work with students as a teacher. Recommended ways for the student observer to become involved include tutoring individual students, leading the whole class in a discussion, or demonstrating problem solving procedures for a small group or the entire class. Regardless of how the observer gets involved, it is important that they have as many opportunities as possible to expose their personality and teaching style to students and the host teacher.

The third and final phase of the program is evaluation. There are two types of evaluations involved. The informal evaluation consists of periodic discussions with the host teacher regarding strengths and weaknesses of the student's performance throughout the semester. This is followed by formal evaluation at the end of the semester. The host teacher evaluates the observer on a standardized appraisal form. This form focuses on the observers use of initiative; response to suggestions and criticism; ability to follow instructions and fulfill responsibilities; interest and enthusiasm in working with students; analyzing students responses to a learning situation; oral communication skills; and overall progress as a prospective teacher during the observation and participation assignment. The evaluation form also includes a section which evaluates the writing of a lesson plan and presentation of that lesson. The characteristics evaluated in this section are written communication skills, academic preparation, ability to plan or organize a

lesson, preparation for teaching in regard to fundamental teaching behavior, ability to establish effective teacher-pupil relationships, originality or imagination, and overall promise of becoming an effective teacher.

Observation-Participation Variations for Industrial Arts

No one system of observation-participation works all the time with all the students. The suggested one class period per week for twelve weeks has evolved into a program of ten visits for at least two hours per visit for preservice industrial arts students. This equals a total of 20 hours of in-class observation-particiation rather than the recommended 12 hours.

There are three configuration for the required 20 hours of observation-participation. The first is the traditional method of visiting one school once a week for two hours for a period of 10 weeks. The advantages of this method are simplified scheduling and working with fewer host teachers. The student observer is placed with only one host teacher for the total time, therefore, they have a greater opportunity to learn the teacher's system and methods of operation. The major disadvantage is the fact that the student observer sees only one school situation and may not get enough experience to form judgements about their own system of teaching.

The second configuration included 10 visits, each two hours in length. With this system the student observer visits an assigned school seven times. The student observes and helps the teacher during the first four visits. During the remaining three visits, the student observer is responsible for writing a formal lesson plan and teaching the lesson. These lessons are observed and evaluated by the host teacher and at least one of the student's peers from the methods class. The last three visits are to other schools to observe and evaluate a classmate. The major advantage of this system is that the observer sees different teaching situations and evaluates three different lessons being taught by other beginning teachers. The student also gains the

experience of organizing and planning their own lesson and presenting it to a "real" class. The main disadvantage of this system is scheduling. It is difficult to plan visits when other university students can observe lessons being taught.

The third method includes 10 visits each which are two hours long, as with the previous system. The student observer spends the first 5 visits at 5 different schools. After these visits, the students choose one of the schools to return to for their remaining five visits. At this time, the student observer becomes involved in all phases of school operation. This system allows the student the opportunity to see five different educational settings and five different teachers. The major disadvantages of this system is scheduling and locating enough host schools to serve all the students.

There are many other ways of organizing an early field experience program. When considering such a program, caution must be given to the following: Location of host schools--There must be a sufficient number of potential host school located near the university so students can attend regular classes in addition to completing their OP. Overuse of host teachers--Use only good host teachers, but use them sparingly. Proper supervision--Arrangements must be made for quality supervision by the host teacher and university personnel. Proper evaluation and follow-up of the total early field experience program--The program needs to be evaluated from time to time to insure the students are benefiting from the activities.

Early field experience programs cannot represent a completely realistic picture of what is involved in teaching. However, after the OP experience students will have experienced a limited but important contact within the secondary classroom.

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